

## Visual Quality

### Studies and Coordination

The fundamental methodology used in the visual quality assessment is documented in the “Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects” manual issued by the Office of Environmental Policy, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation.

Visual quality was determined for existing conditions and for future “build” alternatives. The following criteria were assessed on a scale ranging from 0 to 7 (7 being the highest or best score):

- Vividness (impression of landscape components)
- Intactness (integration of natural and human components)
- Unity (compositional harmony of the view)

The assessments are based on the visual quality of the regional landscape and integrate separate assessments of landforms, water, vegetation, and man-made elements in the fore-, middle-, and background. Man-made elements include vehicles. As much as possible, the assessments were made at actual or visualized observer points.

To assess the visual quality from and towards the proposed Alternatives, 34 viewpoints were selected, representing typical corridor conditions and/or major changes in the landscape. These selections include:

From the Proposed Alignment:

- Sixteen viewpoints from the proposal (A through P, views directed at the surrounding terrain by a typical driver or passenger).
- Seven viewpoints of the proposal (AA through FF, views from/of the proposed roadway structure itself, as seen by a typical driver/passenger).

Toward the Proposed Alignment:

- Eleven areas representing typical neighborhood views toward the proposed alignment structure (Q through Z, views directed toward the proposed alignment structure and/or noise barrier locations from the surrounding neighborhood).

Alternative	Overall Total Score	No. of Areas Assessed	Average Score
Market/Greene	114.6	19	6.0
Havana	91.3	14	6.5
North Option	20.4	6	3.4
South Option	18.0	3	6.0
I-90 Collector/ Distributor	28.1	6	4.7

### Summary Visual Quality Assessment Score

**Table 4-41**

## **Affected Environment**

The proposed project is within the Columbia Basin province in eastern Washington. Native terrain in the vicinity of the project proposal was originally rolling hills, bisected by the Spokane River and its associated flood plain valley. Both alternatives are located over the Spokane Aquifer Recharge Area. Large portions of the proposed alignment corridors have been altered by residential and industrial uses. The original vegetation in the proposal area was *Pinus ponderosa* forest, with steppe or shrub-steppe vegetation community influences. The annual precipitation averages approximately 17-18 inches per year. Residential shade trees, ornamental shrubs, and grass sod have replaced most of the native vegetation in the urbanized area.

The proposed construction involves a new four to eight lane divided structure with full access control. The project includes raised, depressed, and at-grade sections, as well as proposed noise barriers in some locations.

## **Impacts**

### *Views From the Proposed Facility*

The affected view from the facility differs according to the alternative. Both proposed alternatives cross the industrial/railroad area after leaving the existing I-90 corridor, heading north.

Impacts to views from the proposed facility will occur mainly in the vicinity of Minnehaha Park. The proposed depressed roadway section will restrict travelers' views of the park and its historic amenities.

Other views from the proposed facility that will impact visual quality are numerous automobile wrecking yards, aggregate pits and quarries awaiting reclamation, petroleum storage areas, industrial complexes and storage yards, and increased automobile and truck traffic. These visual elements will become more apparent from raised roadway sections or expansive vertical curves.

On the other hand, in many cases structures will enhance views toward the surrounding areas; for example, the view of the mountainous regions to the east of the Market/Greene and Havana Alternatives. The visual variety and character of the countryside, as viewed from the elevated viaduct structure or high cut section, such as proposed around Beacon Hill, would be amplified.

### **Market/Greene Alternative (Preferred Alternative)**

The Market/Greene Alternative crosses the Spokane River at its present location, paralleling the western border of Spokane Community College. North of the river crossing, the visual experience becomes restricted as the proposed roadway alignment becomes depressed, paralleling the Hillyard retail and industrial area along an acquired railroad grade corridor.

### **Havana Alternative**

The Havana Alternative crosses the Spokane River East of the Spokane Community College. North of the river crossing, the traveler will have a rural/industrial view to the east of the corridor, and a view of residential area to the west. The distant view of undeveloped areas, including Beacon Hill, provides the dominant visual

experience. The proposed alignment continues northward to traverse Minnehaha Park, paralleling Esmeralda Golf Course, Mount Baldy, and undeveloped areas, and providing a view of the Mount St. Michael Scholasticate monastery complex.

### **North/South Options**

The northern portion of the project proposes either a North or South alignment option around the large industrial facilities in the area. The options provide a route starting at approximately Lincoln Road and traversing to the northwest and US 2 and US 395. Both options travel over relatively flat Rural/Industrial areas, with few notable visual features.

### **I-90 Collector/Distributor (C/D) System (part of the Preferred Alternative)**

Noise barriers are expected to be located at the roadway shoulder on the raised structure sections, and at an undefined distance between the shoulder and right of way line in the at-grade and depressed roadway sections. These barriers are anticipated to be 10 to 12 feet high, and will partially extend onto “fly-over” ramps entering onto and exiting from the C/D system along the I-90 corridor. New Jersey type concrete traffic barriers will be used on elevated roadway structures to delineate lanes and structure edges. These traffic barriers and noise walls will block views of the residential areas on the north and south sides of the C/D.

### ***Views Toward the Facility***

The visual quality of views toward the facility is greatly impacted by the proposed raised alignment sections. Proposed viaducts, bridges, and major arterial overcrossing structures will introduce or increase the “urban” visual element seen from park and recreational areas and residential neighborhoods located along the routes.

### **Market/Greene Alternative (Preferred Alternative)**

Noise barriers are proposed for several locations along raised alignment sections through residential neighborhoods, but they will generally fall short of totally relieving the “urban” visual impact of the proposed structure. The proposed depressed roadway section paralleling the Hillyard area requires a noise barrier to mitigate noise impacts on the residential neighborhood and Wild Horse Park on the east side of the proposed alignment. (This particular noise barrier should actually improve the visual quality within the neighborhood and park by screening out the traffic congestion and the retail nature of the Hillyard corridor).

### **Havana Alternative**

The presence of a major roadway structure through Minnehaha Park, and parallel to Esmeralda Golf Course and the Mount Baldy undeveloped areas, will definitely impact the visual quality of views toward the proposed facility.

### ***Light and Glare Impacts***

Although the proposal will not incorporate glass or reflective materials within the roadway structure itself, there will be additional reflection of sunlight from vehicle windshields and body finishes. Luminaires placed along the alignment and at arterial interchanges to provide safer night travel will produce additional light and glare. Also, light and glare from the headlights of the increased volumes of traffic will impact residential neighborhoods near the corridor.

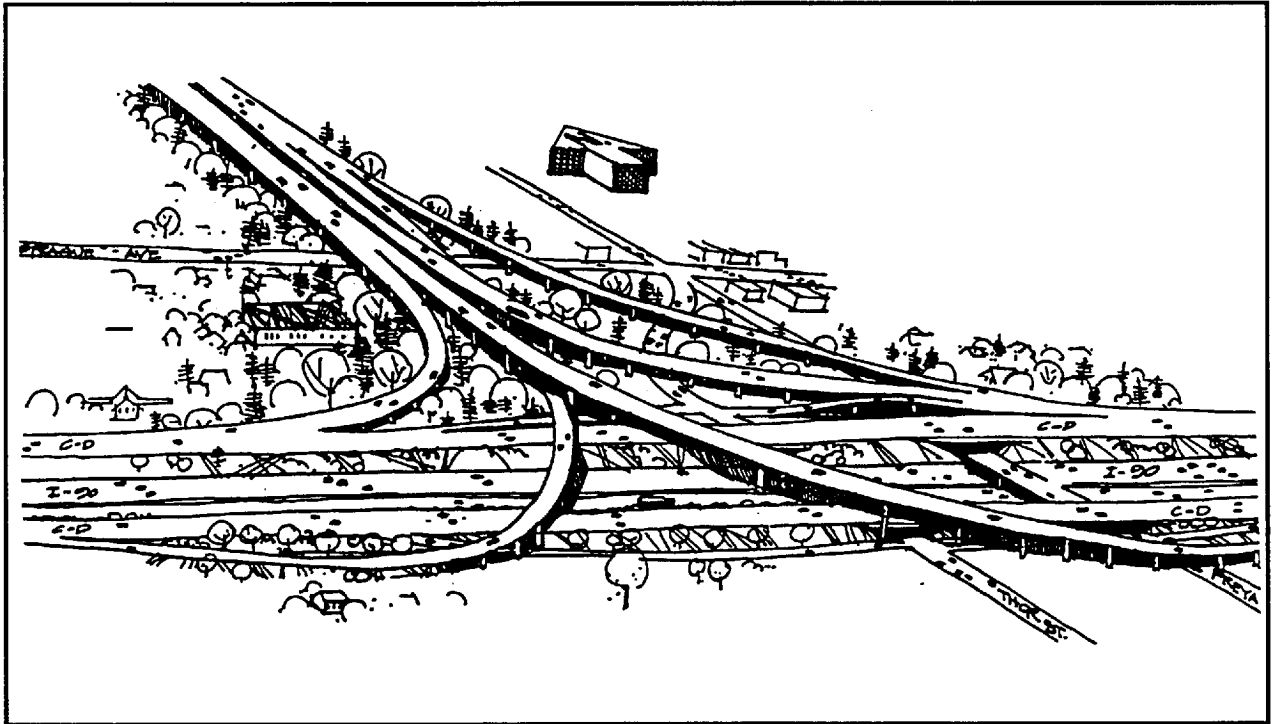
## Visual Impacts of Induced Growth

The induced growth that may occur at the eastern limits of the arterial overcrossings will impact the rural, residential, and undeveloped areas near the corridor. Fast food outlets, gas stations, small retail outlets and developments, and additional residential expansion may follow the improved access provided by the new freeway facility. The US 2 and US 395 interchanges may promote increased retail development in existing rural/undeveloped and rural/residential areas.

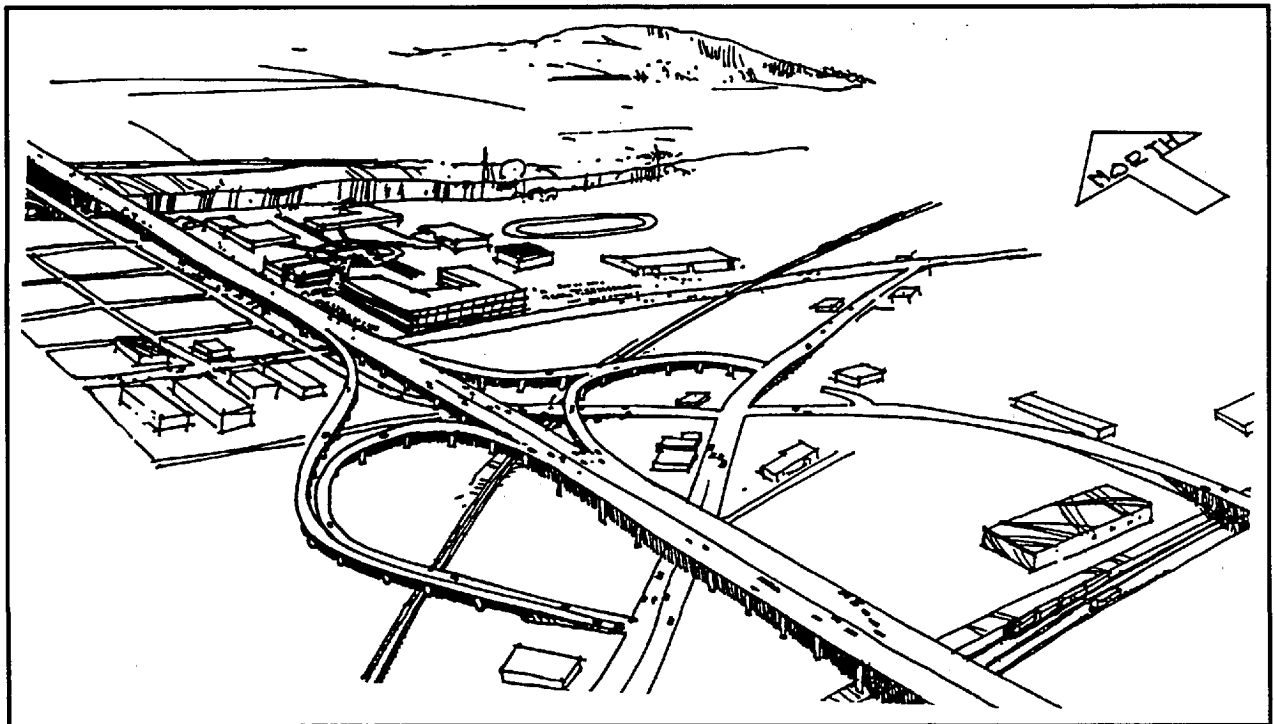
## Mitigation

### *Design Quality, Architecture, and Landscape Architecture Proposed During Facility Operation*

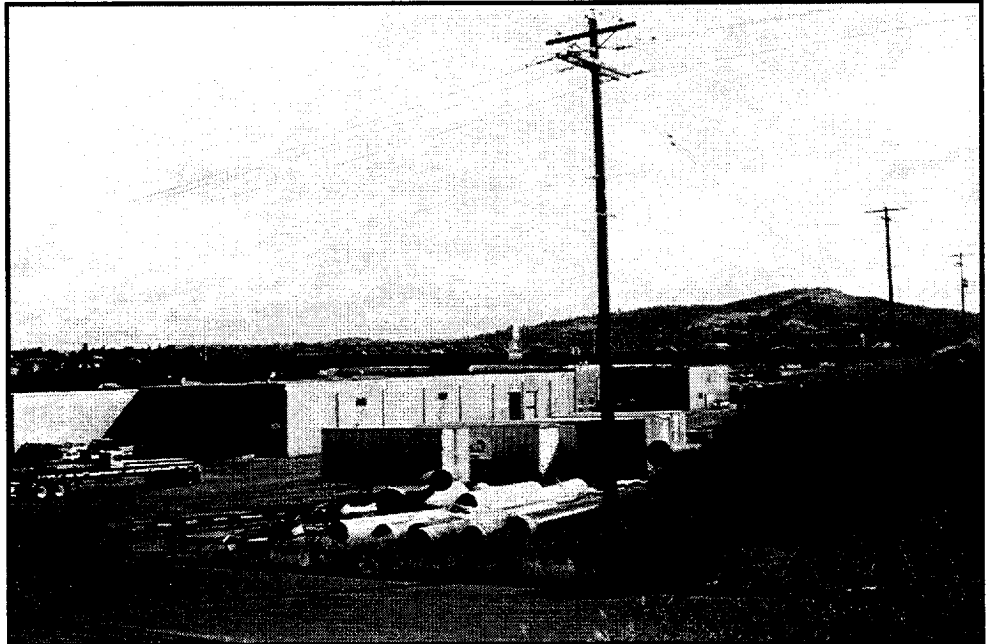
- All structural elements such as walls, bridges, buildings, and sign bridges will be developed to harmonize with existing structures and other landscape elements that are included in the transportation corridor. The final design will be coordinated with the WSDOT Olympia Service Center's Landscape Architecture Branch.
- Contour grading of the alignment structure and interchange slopes will blend "cuts and fills" into the adjacent landforms. This may include varying slope angles and rounding slope edges near drainage channels and roadside ditches. Where roadway slope construction would result in extensive right of way purchases or visual impacts, consideration will be given to structural solutions such as retaining walls.
- A Roadside Master Plan will be developed to provide guidance to the design process. Native trees, shrubs, and grasses are proposed, to visually soften the structural elements. Some non-native shade trees and/or shrubs may be interspersed among the native plantings to provide continuity and cohesiveness with the vegetation found within the parks and residential neighborhoods bordering the proposed alignment.
- Planting pockets to provide landscape opportunities along the I-90 and proposed freeway corridors will be incorporated into the design of the noise barriers. These pockets of vegetation will break the continuity of the barrier alignment to help relieve visual monotony, and create visual diversity.
- Structures that are visually part of adjacent neighborhoods may be considered for art or architectural treatments initiated by the community.



**Figure 4-54**  
*I-90 Interchange Looking North.*

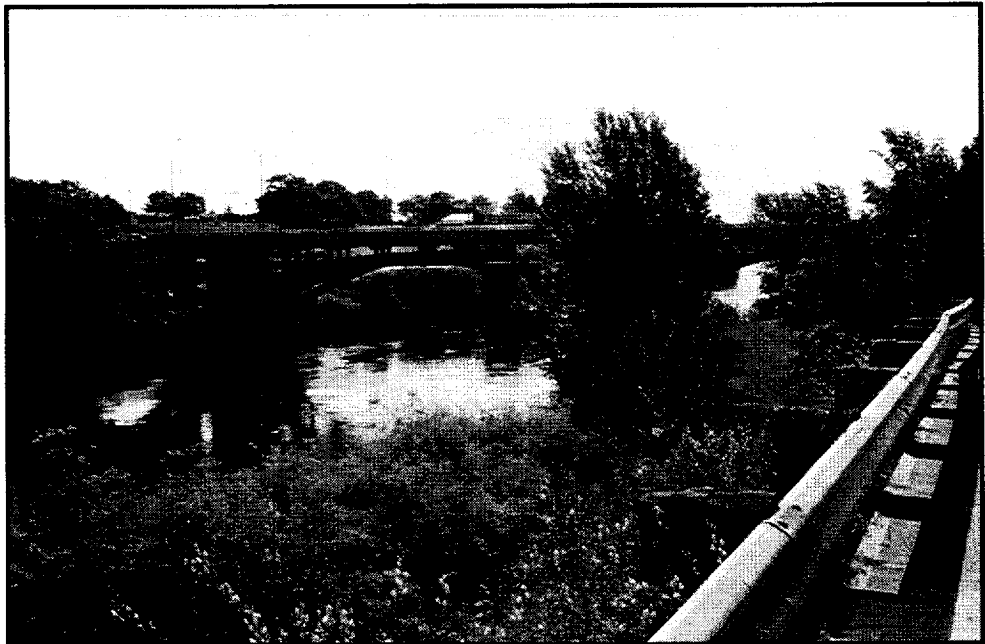


**Figure 4-55**  
*Trent Interchange Looking Northeast*



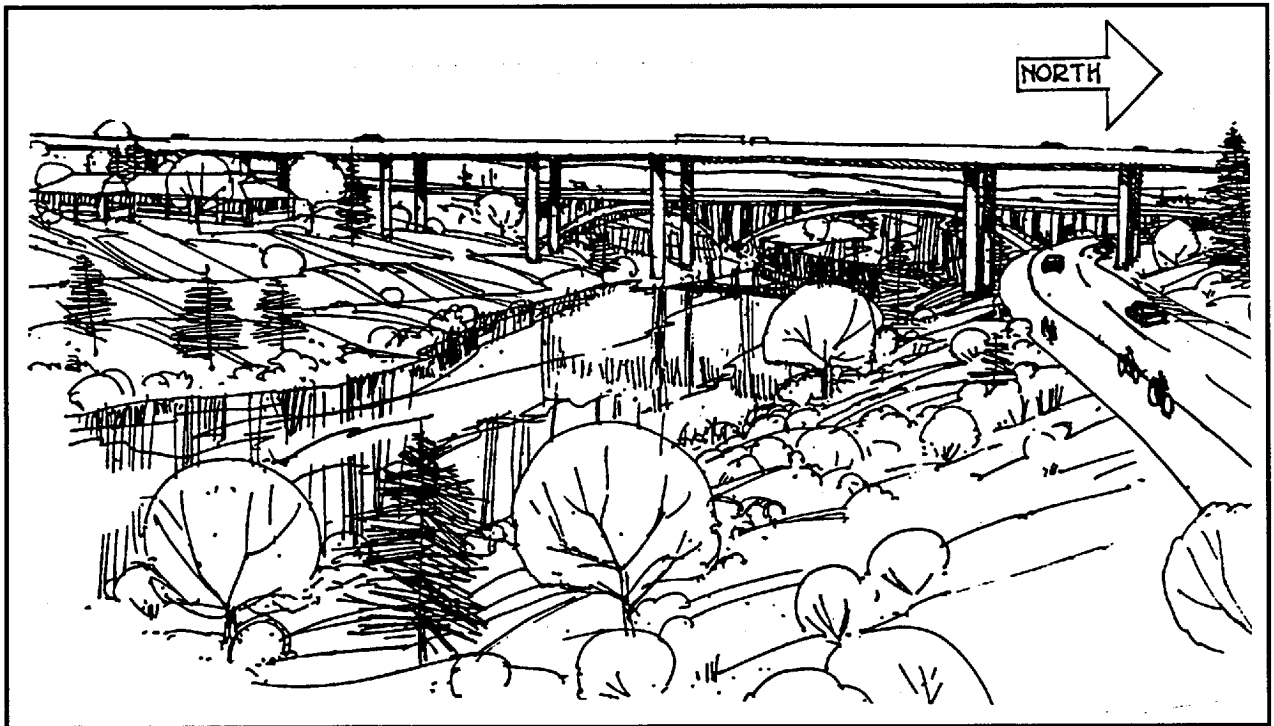
**Figure 4-56**

*The Freya Way Structure rises above industrial buildings as it spans the railroad tracks. Beacon Hill is in the background (looking northeast).*

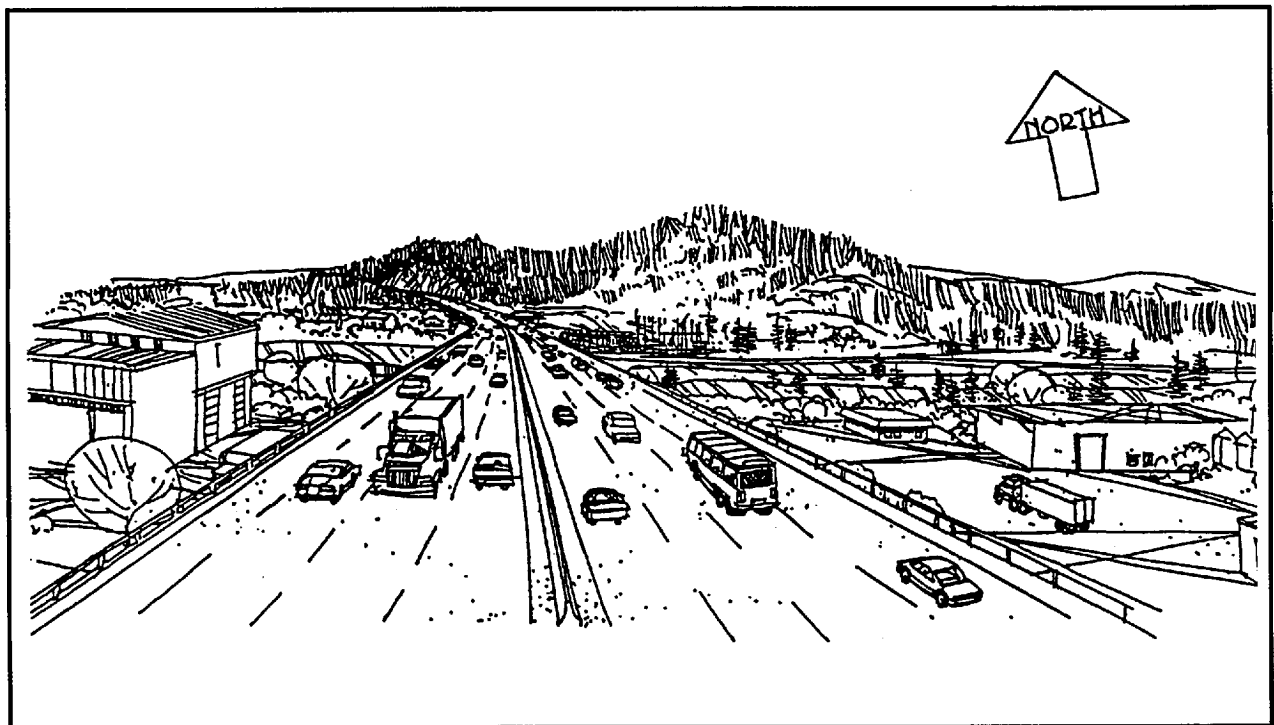


**Figure 4-57**

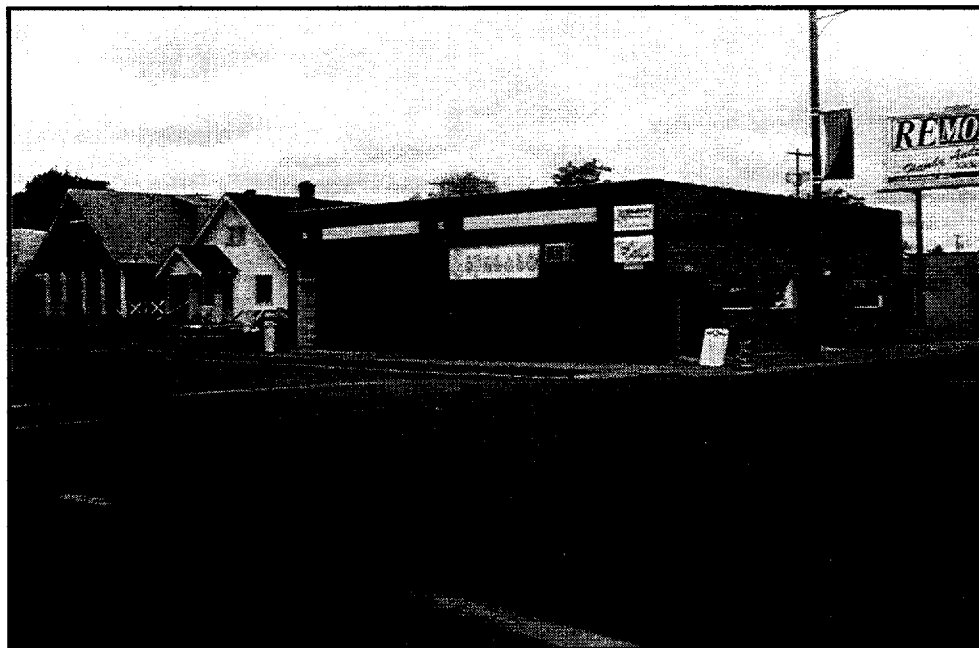
*A variety of natural vegetation lends a pleasing appearance to the existing Greene Street Bridge as viewed from Upriver Drive (looking west)*



**Figure 4-58**  
*Spokane River Crossing Looking West*



**Figure 4-59**  
*Havana Approach to the Spokane River Looking North.*



**Figure 4-60**

*Homes next to small businesses are found near Market Street in Hillyard (looking north).*



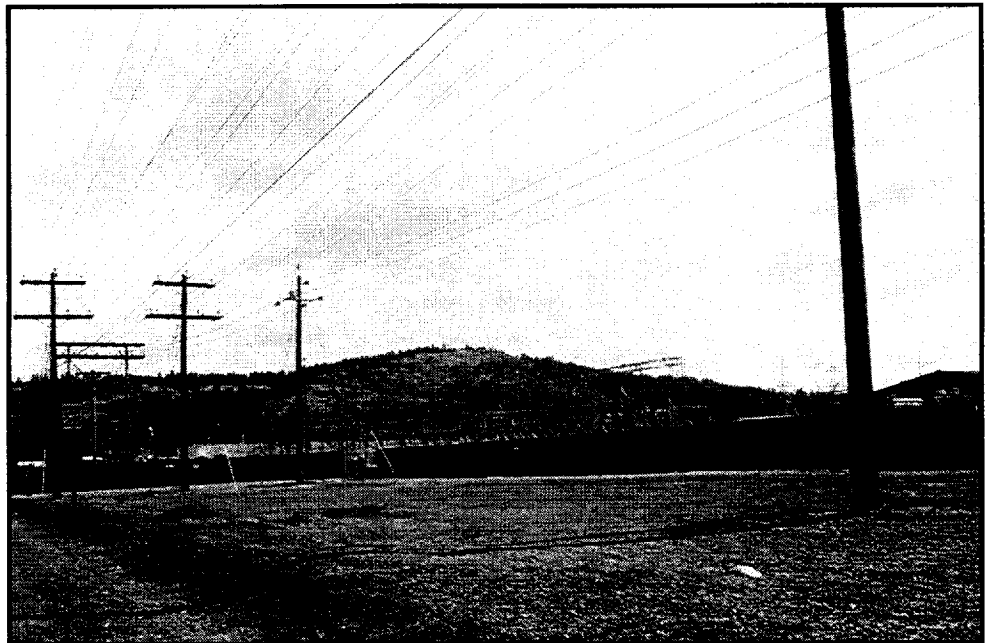
**Figure 4-61**

*Looking north across railroad tracks and vacant fields toward Beacon Hill. Note the trees lining the bank of the Spokane River.*



**Figure 4-62**

*The trees and shrubs mask the Spokane River just east of the project area (viewed from the north bank looking south).*

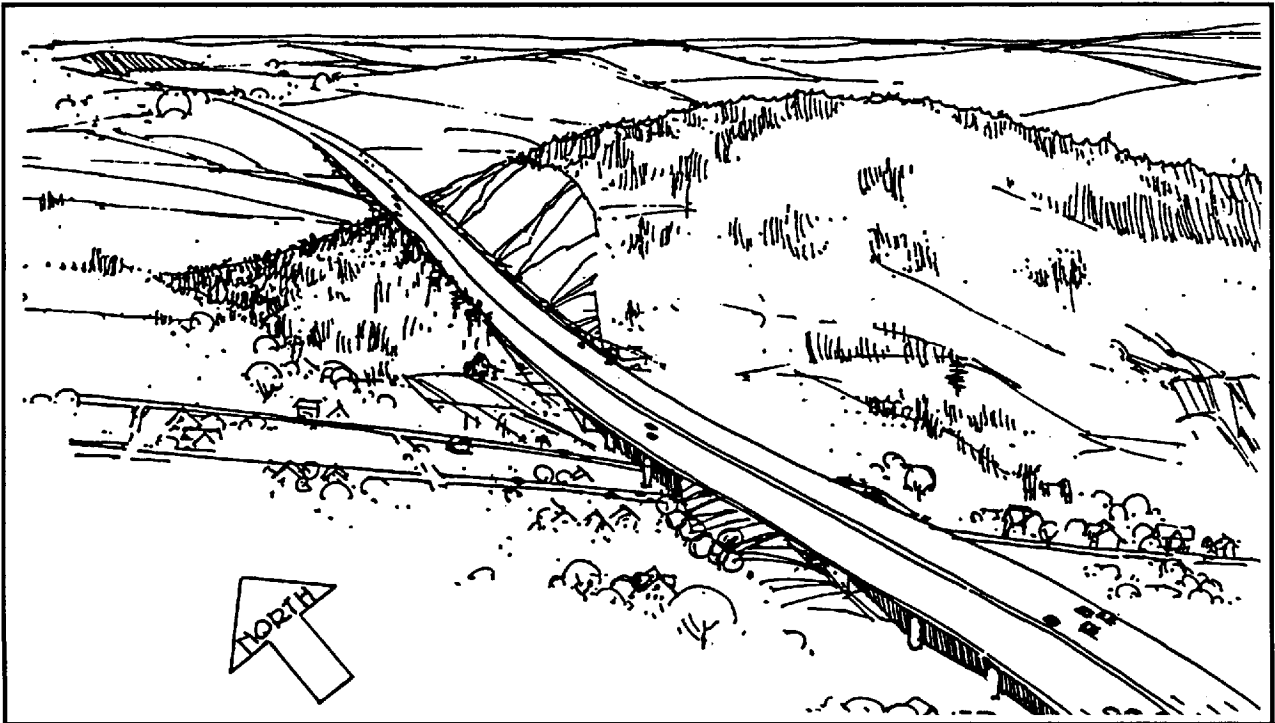


**Figure 4-63**

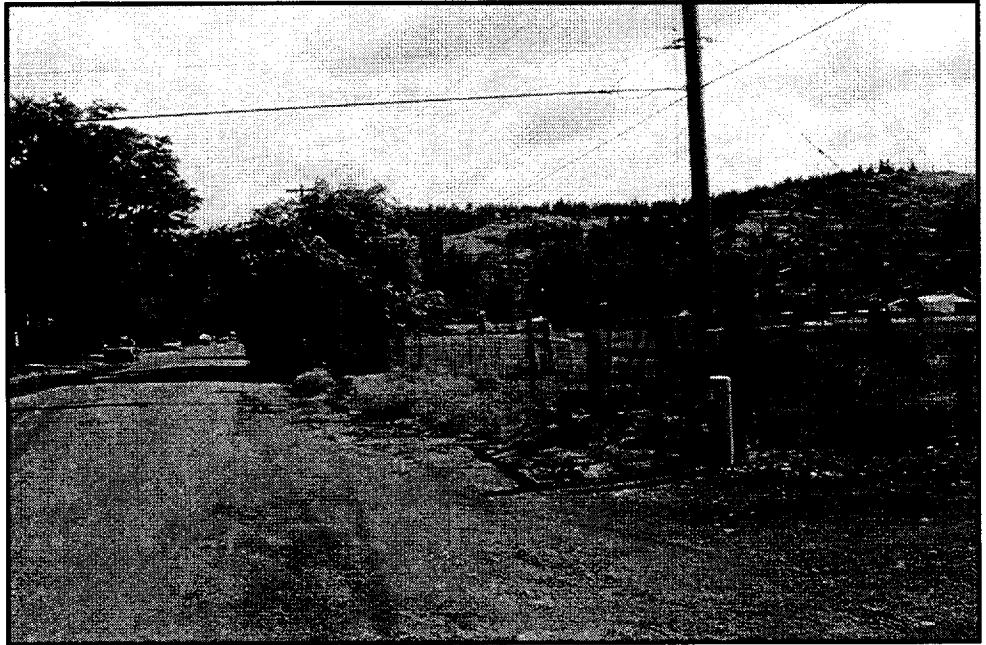
*The view of Beacon Hill from the eastern edge of the project north of the Spokane River is obscured by the substation and power lines (looking north).*



**Figure 4-64**  
*Frederick Overpass Looking East*

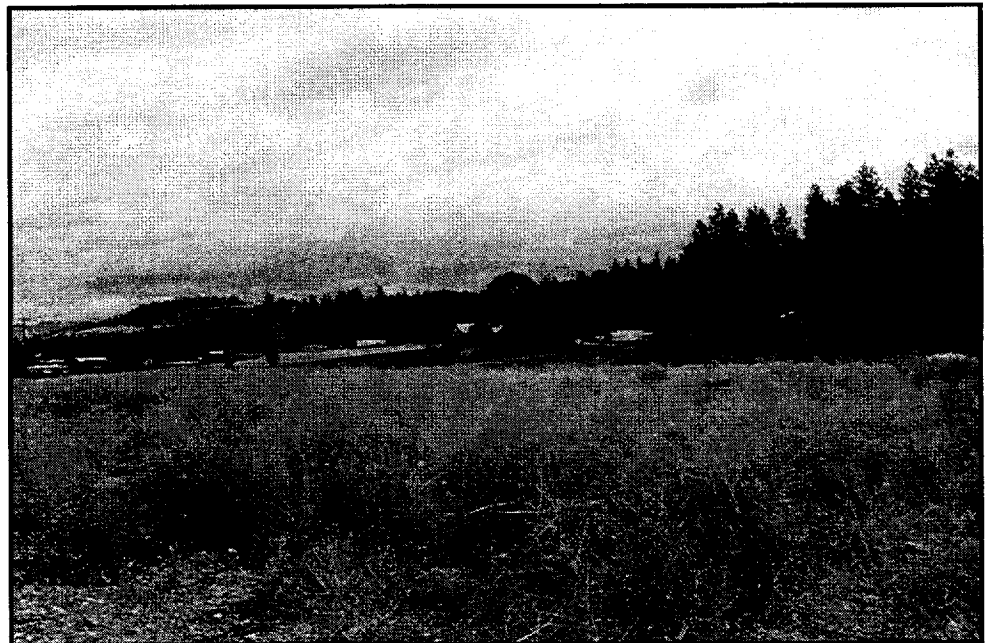


**Figure 4-65**  
*Minnehaha/Beacon Hill Cut Looking North*



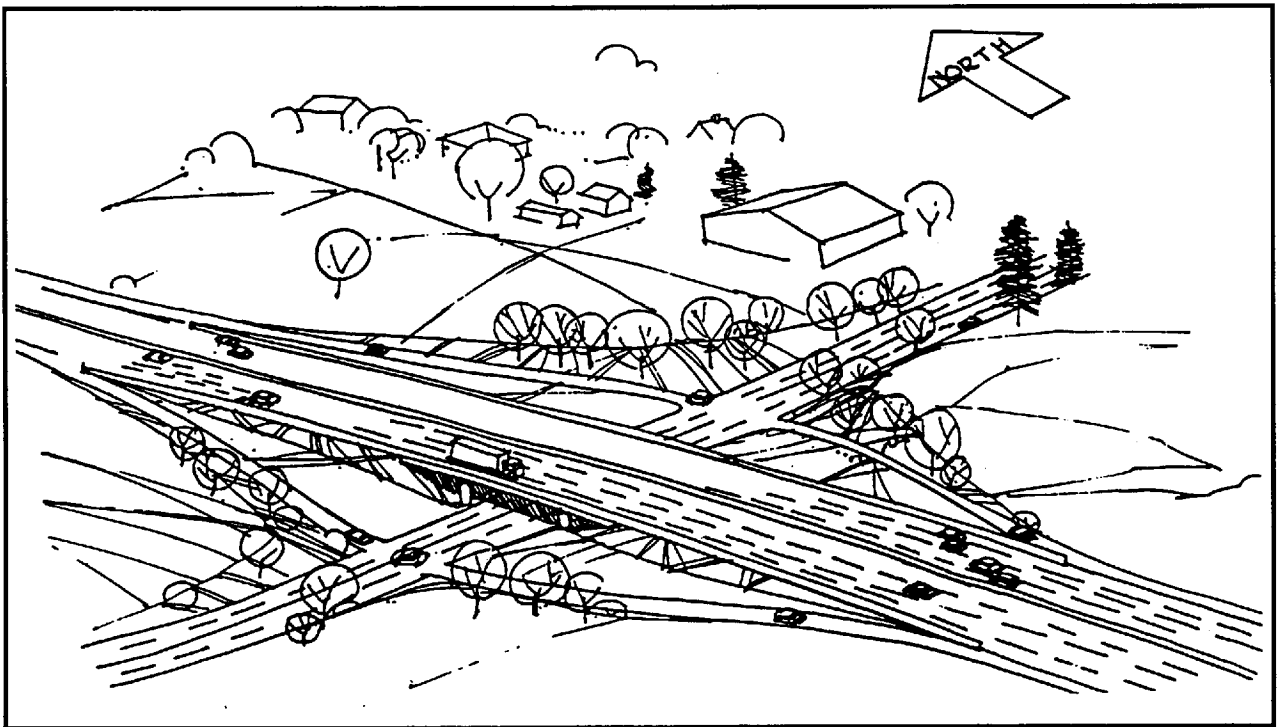
**Figure 4-66**

*The transition to a rural environment is made moving northward.*

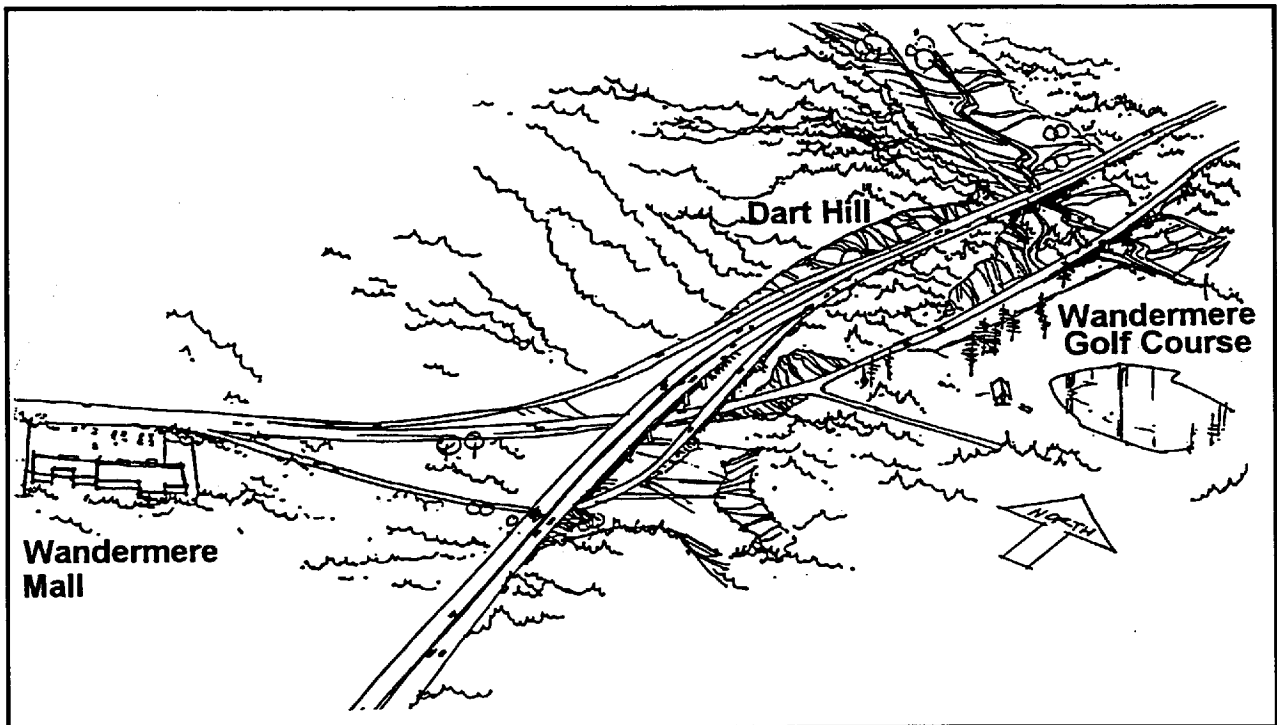


**Figure 4-67**

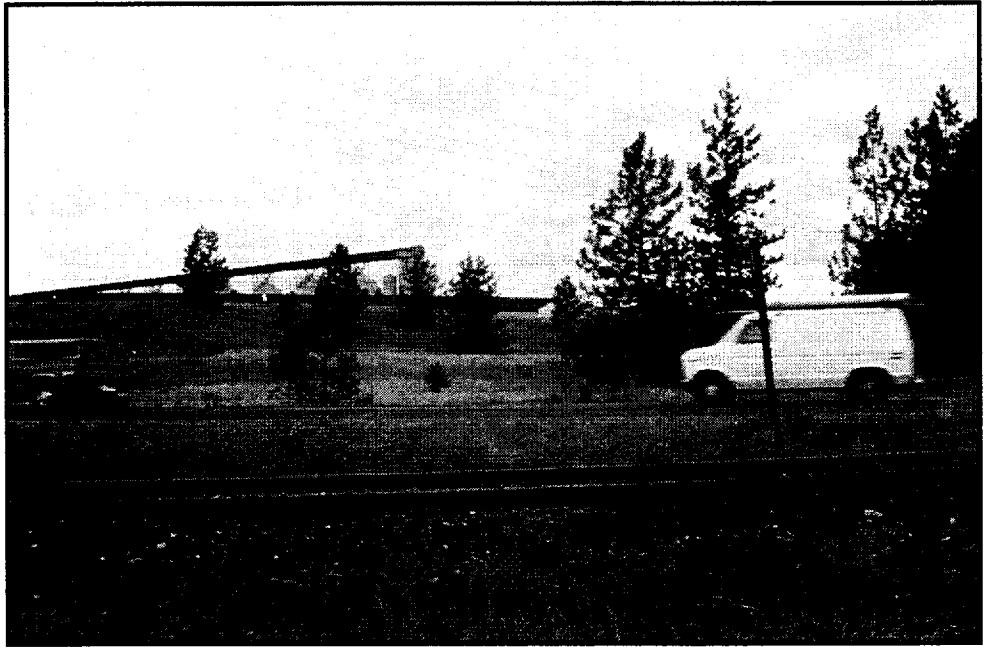
*Ranch homes near the mountain ridge create a pleasant rural scene (east of Havana looking north).*



**Figure 4-68**  
*Wellesley Interchange Looking Northeast*

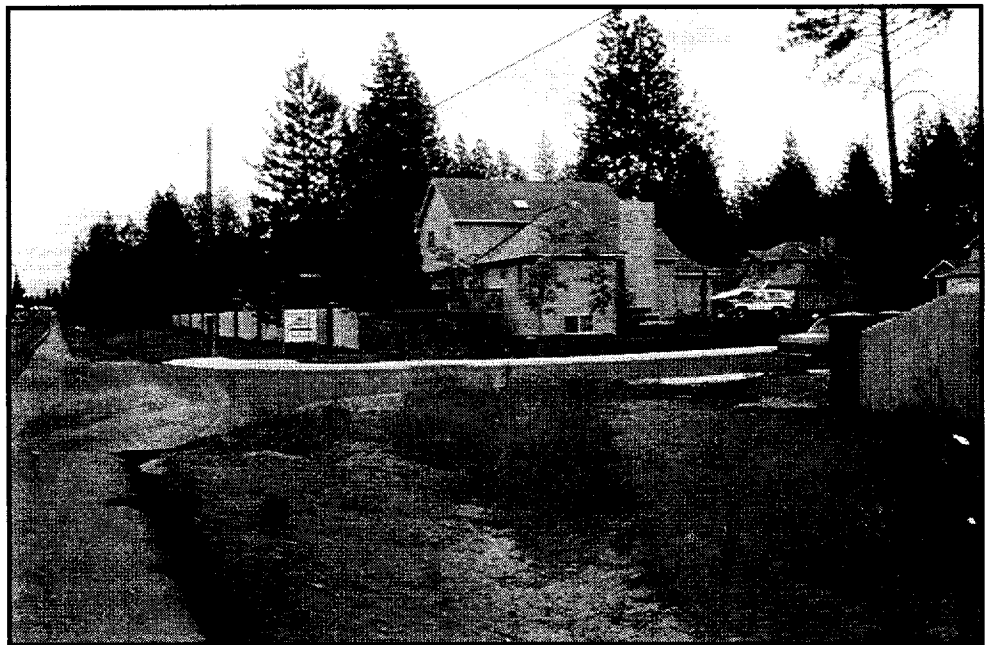


**Figure 4-69**  
*Dart Hill Cut (just south of the Little Spokane River) Looking West*



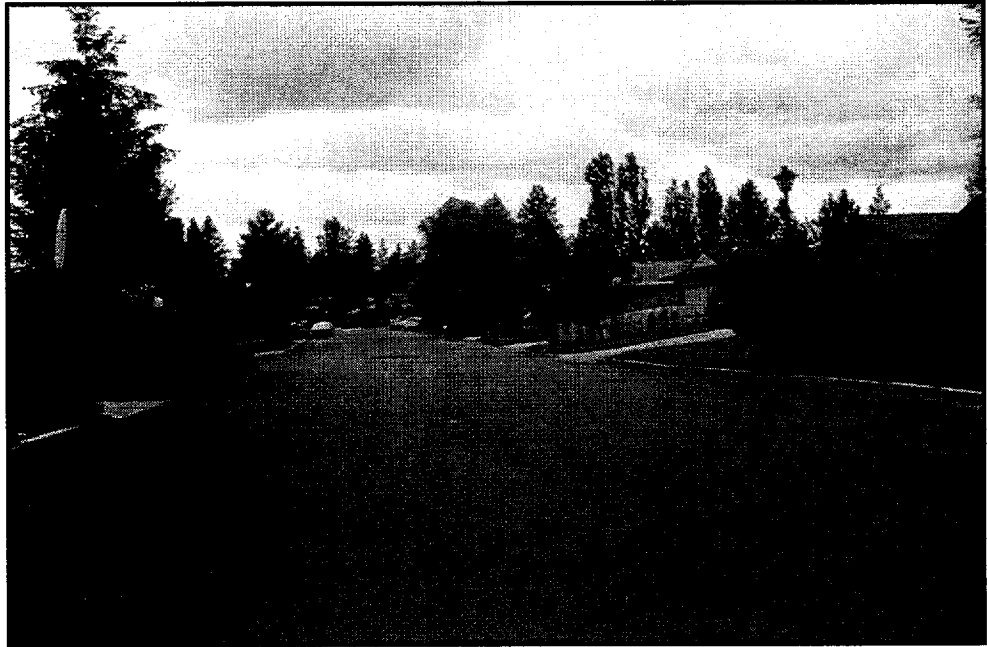
**Figure 4-70**

*Kaiser-Mead is surrounded by flat to rolling ground. Open spaces are broken by grass covered dunes and pockets of pine trees.*



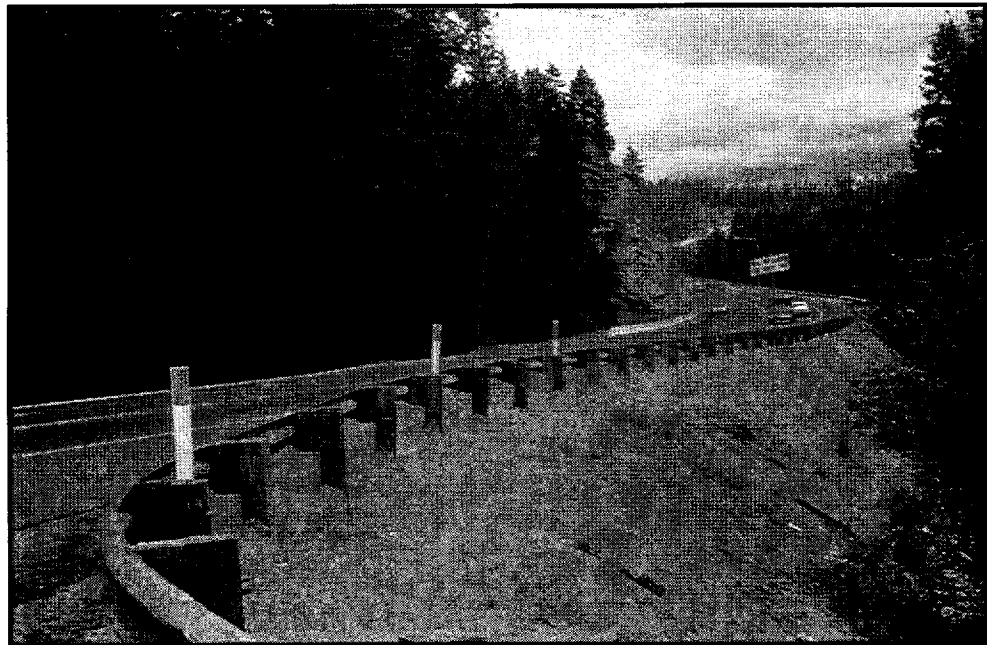
**Figure 4-71**

*Residential developments in the project's north end often leave existing trees as part of the landscape. This development is near Farwell Road.*



**Figure 4-72**

*Landscaped subdivisions are located in the largely wooded area between SR 2 and US 395.*



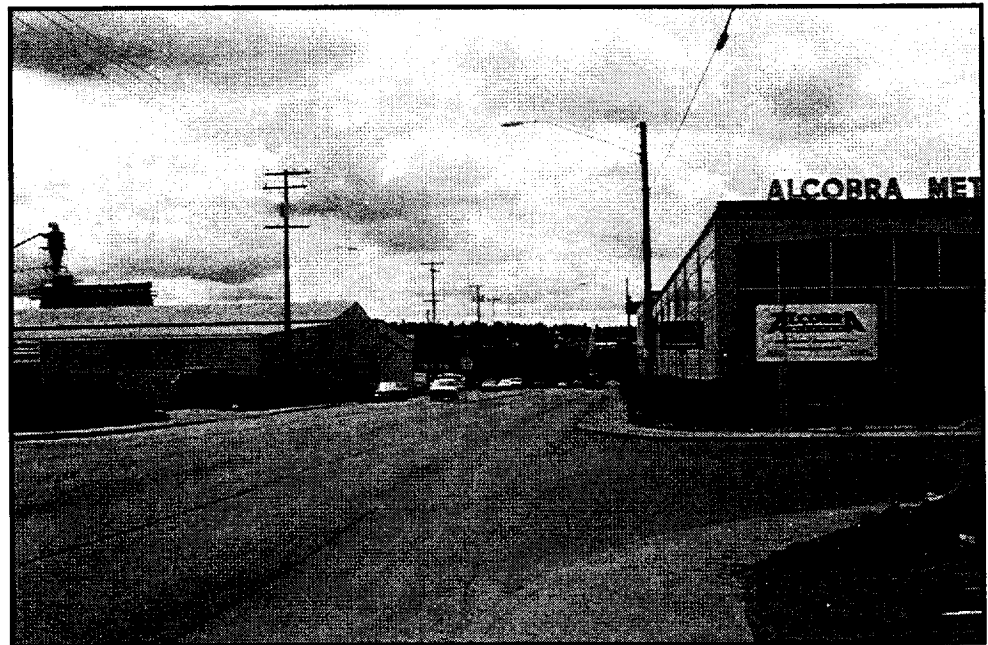
**Figure 4-73**

*A heavily forested strip of land is seen along US 395 just south of Wandermere Golf Course and the Little Spokane River (looking north).*



**Figure 4-74**

*The western end of the I-90 Collector/Distributor System would be at the Liberty Park (Hamilton) interchange with I-90 (looking east).*



**Figure 4-75**

*North of the Sprague Avenue commercial strip, there is an industrial area that continues to Trent Avenue (looking south).*